

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Ottawa, Canada

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Lessons Learned: Crossdressing & Feminism

I, or we, belong to a very special group consisting of transvestites and some transsexuals. My experience with this group has been wholesome, life expanding and generally a beautiful experience. Because of my crossdressing and the group, I am able to be a lot more open to my lady friends and while they have accepted this part of me, they've been kind enough to point out inconsistencies in my attitude towards women in general. It seems that I was committing a few "faux pas" and engaging in sexist comments while pretending to do

otherwise. Thankfully they have stood by me and helped me to cease such boorish and self-defeating mannerisms. I have divided my essay into three parts, to wit: part one examines some of my more colourful "faux-pas", part two deals with my desire to strengthen the group and lastly, I share some general views I subscribe to. I hope you gain from this as much as I gained in learning it the hard way.



Part One

1. Never tell a woman that because you cross-dress, you have gained a real knowledge of what a woman is. Although we gain a peek at some stereotype activities, not being born or actively living as females, we cannot fully understand what it means.

2. Never presume to tell or hint to a woman how much make-up to wear or what clothes would make her look more sexy. That's telling any woman, that I a man, will show her how to be a woman.

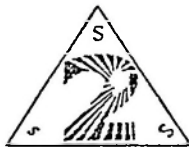
3. I love high heels and mini skirts but I'm beginning to think only teenaged girls and TV's wear them. It has been explained to me, quite rightly, that these are not very comfortable articles of clothing and most women want first of all to be comfortable. Also, they are not set on earth simply for my sexual arousal.

4. Feminism's goals are common sense goals and I for one have come to realize that my freedom and acceptance by society at large is incumbent on every minority's freedom. In terms of power, women

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"Resolve to be thyself: and know that he
Who finds himself, loses his misery."

Matthew Arnold
Self-dependence

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comprise the largest minority in the world, and need and deserve our wholehearted support. They merit our respect simply by being human. 5. Most people find it at first a touch hard to accept my transvestism, so why bore them with my life story and how I can relate to them. Once I've told them I'm a TV, most people are curious, then I can answer their questions briefly and succinctly. I'm trying not to overwhelm anyone and to let them accept me at their own pace. So now I tell them only as they ask, so that over time, they become comfortable with who I am. I'm not only a TV, I'm also a myriad of complexities like any other human being.

6. Most new member's wives/girlfriends/significant others are trying to accept their own mates crossdressing without any TV or TS telling them how close she is to her operation. I've found it tends to make them more ill at ease than accepting. If she really wants to know, she'll ask.

7. There are certain things that are a fact of life to a great number of women that I've glossed over or even misunderstood thereby subconsciously belittling the very people I'm trying to emulate. In a majority of cases, being female means that one is underpaid and undervalued for her contributions to her family, job and society. It also means being

aware constantly of people and places and violence. Too many women are forced to deal with hatred and violence as a fact of life. Sexism is as much an act of aggression as is rape and physical and emotional abuse.

Part Two

1. I have no greater joy than to be crossdressed. It is at once relaxing, exciting, enjoyable and just plain comfortable. Why are we, as a whole, so fearful and ashamed to tell anyone? Transvestites and transsexuals should not be victimized by anyone, including ourselves. Be proud of who you are.

2. Please get involved in the group. Offer suggestions even if you think no one will agree. We may never have looked at something quite the way you do. So attend meetings if you can. If for some reason the group is not giving you what you expected,

articulate these thoughts. Most disappointments are due to our not making ourselves understood.

3. When a new member joins, make it a priority to make her feel at home and at ease. Introduce yourself and let her know she's among friends.

4. Every group has a few members who have access or are available for specialized things, like access to a beautician or a shoe store or whatever. Make new members aware of whom these members are.



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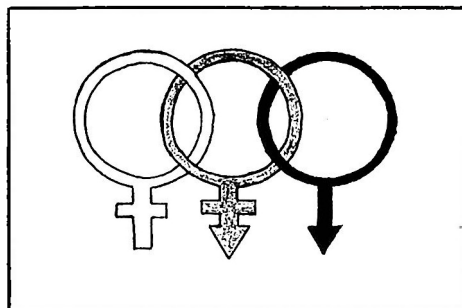
5. The newsletter is a diary, our record of where we've been, are at and are going, so please contribute. No matter how similar each of our histories were, you're unique and only you can feel your experiences. So share these with us so we can get to know you a little better.

Part Three

1. I am realizing that I and only I create my own walls, my own person. I must seek and acquire my own acceptance and happiness. To quote Emerson: "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself." He may not have had any TV friends but it speaks to me. To also quote the ancient philosopher Epictetus who in Discourses wrote: "No man is free who is not master of himself."

2. You are a unique, wonderful, creative, vibrant, fairly well adjusted member of society who happens to love wearing women's clothes at times. So what? I usually remind friends of what a wise old man once told me: "Instead of biting off my finger, look to where it's pointing."

Let me say that although one is forever alone, born and dies alone, we can touch upon each other in joy, however briefly. Let's celebrate our uniqueness and try to enjoy each and every moment of the only life we get. Shame and guilt are someone else's opinions, not mine. I choose life, not as a victim or victimizer, but as a joyful and creative human being



either while I'm dressed or in my male self.

I am a humanist and very pro feminist because I've honestly searched my soul and come to the realization that women's goals are my own to a great extent. Freedom is conditional on every person being free around me. I may not be able to change the world, but I can try with a smile and my inner joy to affect the changes I can make.

My own dream is to liberate transvestites and transsexuals from the closet that society wants to keep us in. I ask for no help and whether or not I'm successful isn't germane to anyone else at all. I just choose not to hide who I am.

Let me once more quote Emerson. "Whoso would be a man, must be a non-conformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."

I want to get every ounce of joy and love out of my life, so how can I hide or feel shame for a part of it. I cannot forget the old maxim "Wherever I go, there I am" a male who loves to crossdress.

Niki Avon

ON BEING WHO YOU WANT TO BE

I recently came across your group's newsletter (issue 89, no. 4) and enjoyed it very much. There isn't a whole lot out there for us, so it's always nice to hear how others are doing. I particularly liked your article "Limited by the Fantasy".

I am 38 years old and I began wearing women's clothes for the first time about eight years ago. How I got started doesn't matter at this stage, so I won't bore you - it's a long story. However, I have had my wife's understanding, support and encouragement right from day one, and I believe acceptance by one's spouse, to a large extent, determines just how far some of us will go. I agree with you that it isn't necessary for someone to have a second identity just because he likes feminine attire. For years I wished I could wear what I liked in public, whether it was just a skirt or the whole nine yards. But it wasn't to be, I was confined to the house, afraid to go out. But the worst part was being alone. Were there other couples like us?

A year and a half ago, I managed to begin corresponding with others. They all sent photos of gorgeous women; themselves! I was jealous. I'd never used makeup and I didn't even own a wig. I was curious as to just how feminine I could look. We ended up spending a small fortune on makeup, a larger one on a wig. My first few tries were horrid to say the least. However, I eventually



got the hang of it and when my wife thought I looked reasonable, we shot a roll of film. I sent off reprints to my correspondents and life alone came to an end. After meeting another crossdresser for the very first time, I realized that for me, complete femininity in public was what I really wanted. I didn't want to be thought of as a man in women's clothes. I wanted to blend in with other women and share their lifestyle. Good or bad, I wanted to experience everyday life as a woman.

When I finally did go out for the first time, I experienced emotions that I never had before. I truly felt as if I was a female. It wasn't just the clothes anymore. I realized for the first time I had a strong female personality. When I began crossdressing, a second identity was the farthest thing from my mind. But after being in public, all that changed, and with my wife's encouragement, my femininity became so strong that it had to be expressed outwardly.

You made a good point when you said we put too much emphasis on "passing". We

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tend to think of it as the ultimate goal, but it really isn't. For those of us who do go out, it is important, but not as important as confidence. Let's face it, no one fools all the people all the time. It's the ability to look people straight in the eye, even when we know we've been spotted. But of course to get this far one must put a lot of emphasis on "passing". It's the classic "Catch 22". It's hard to

pass when you have no confidence in yourself. It's hard to be confident if you don't pass very well. But even this isn't always true. I know crossdressers who have a hard time passing several hundred feet away, yet they still go shopping and to restaurants; and believe it or not, they are seldom harassed, the worst reactions being a snide remark, the lightest being a laugh or nothing at all. The extent to which some of us dress or behave also depends on how we think society will react. I'm sure those who dream of shopping for a dress or lingerie would do so if they thought they would not attract attention. But there is always the fear of aggression, and for that reason alone, most of us will never experience life as a "woman" in public.

True, a lot of crossdressers have no desire to dress completely as women. For some, the thought of

shaved legs, makeup and perfume is considered too extreme. Others believe that those of us who spend a lot of time as women are on the verge of a sex change. Still others think that if you don't dress completely in every detail, why bother at all? But the beauty of our lifestyle is that there is no right or

wrong way. We dress solely to express our femininity. We of all people shouldn't be judging people by what they wear! This letter may be giving you the impression that every time I dress

"The beauty of our lifestyle is that there is no right or wrong way. We dress solely to express our femininity. We of all people shouldn't be judging people by what they wear!"

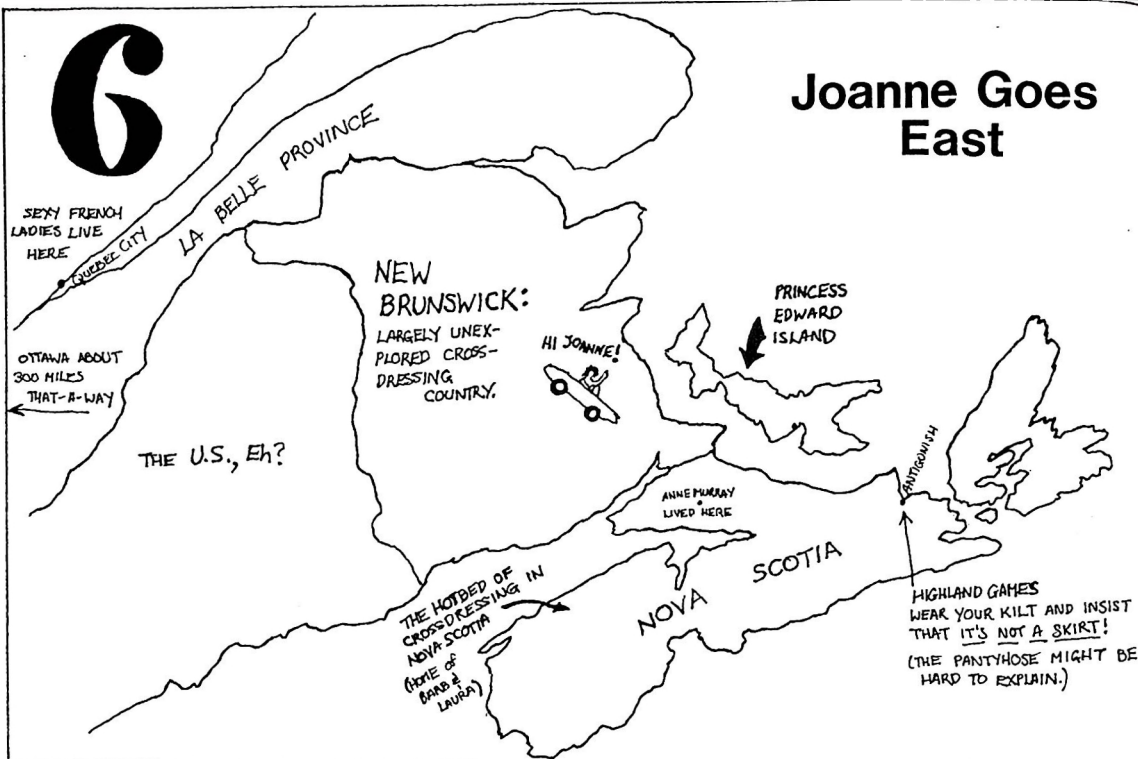
I go hell bent for leather, but that isn't the case. I feel just as good about myself at home in maybe a dress and heels without all the makeup as I do all dolled up ready to go downtown. But none of this would be possible if it were not for one thing (excluding my wife), and that is support groups.

Without such groups, we'd all probably still be stuck in our closets, doomed to a life of loneliness and guilt. I think it's great that your group produces a newsletter. Such publications are necessary in that they inform others as to just how large and diverse the crossdressing population is. When the general public get hold of such literature, it helps them to understand but not necessarily accept us. But it is a step in the right direction.

In closing, I'd like to say you are right about being "limited by the fantasy."

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Joanne Goes East

This is the continuing story of Joanne and her mother traveling to the east coast of Canada.

After leaving Toronto, we headed back to Ottawa to get ready for the next leg of our trip. I had packed several outfits along with my prettiest lingerie, jewelry, wigs, makeup and high heel shoes so Joanne could look her best every day. I had packed a sweat shirt and jeans just in case we had any problems. I was wearing a comfortable skirt and blouse as we had to drive a few miles to our first rest stop. It felt good to be able to express myself as Joanne and to sign motel registers as a woman, and to be treated as a female by the guys and girls who waited on us or filled the gas tank on my car.

We drove for several hours enjoying the sights before we would find a motel where we could freshen up and

relax for awhile before eating. Sometimes I would have to change my clothes as they were creased from sitting down, and then fix up my makeup and comb my hair, making sure everything was just right. We would eat at the finer restaurants in town, then take a walk looking at the sights or window shop, then head back to the motel and watch television. I would then slip into my silk and lace negligee and fall asleep wondering if all girls were this lucky.

The next morning I let my mother use the washroom first as I picked out my clothes for the day. When she finished, I gathered my clothes and makeup and went into the washroom to begin my transformation. I put on my makeup, which took about an hour trying to hide my male features, then my nylons, bra and panty set, beautiful nylon and lace full slip, wig, high heels,

Jewelry and a dress. Every day was better than the last as Joanne was getting better at makeup, walking, sitting, eating and even standing while waiting for something.

We traveled through Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and P.E.I., stopping at some of the smaller towns to take pictures and walk down the main street to window shop. We stayed for a few days in Halifax as I wanted to see our navy and some of the historic landmarks in the area. The first day we took a walk on the boardwalk on the harbourfront. I was wearing a dress with a full skirt, my shoulder length wig and high heel shoes. The wind was gusting around as we walked, lifting my dress a little and allowing my slip to show. We looked at some of the old wooden sailing ships in port and some of the ocean going vessels loading up with cargo. Up until now Joanne had never been real close to anybody for a long period of time; even in restaurants my back had been to the people. Well all that ended when my mother and I went on a sightseeing cruise on a tour boat. The cruise lasted about two hours and was a real test of Joanne's ability to pass as a woman. When we boarded the boat, the first mate helped me and my mother aboard. There were about seventy five passengers on board as we headed out into the harbour and the Atlantic Ocean. The host explained all the historic sights in the harbour as we passed some navy ships and submarines. The wind was blowing harder in the open water and my skirt was lifting up again, showing off my slip. Well, so what?

My wig was sticking to my makeup as it blew around, my earrings were clanging as they hit the side of my neck, but I felt really good about myself. I was secure at being a woman and being accepted by everyone on the cruise. The trip was enjoyed by all. I thanked the crew members as I left the boat and then had to fix myself up as the salt water had splashed on my face and made my mascara run a little. The feeling I had while out on the water cannot be described, but Joanne was accepted as a real woman.

The next day we went shopping at some of the bigger malls. Sometimes we went into stores and tried on a few outfits and I would look into the mirror and see Joanne. We would also go into the lingerie boutiques where Joanne would touch the soft fabric of a beautiful negligee hanging on a rack or feel the satin of a lace teddy draped over a chair. Each time I wanted to buy the feminine article and put it in my wardrobe next to my other clothes, but unfortunately Joanne did not have that kind of money to spend.

Next Issue:

Joanne Goes to the Gaspé

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Even for those of us who manage to "pass", it is just that. But it's nice to know that once in a while, reality isn't too far away. We just have to ignore society and be what we want to be.

Sincerely,
Jennifer
Madeira Park, B.C.

THE BACK PAGE

Of Names, Finances and Great Deals

The rumours have been flying around the capital recently regarding a possible name change for our humble organization after Niki's arguments in the last issue of Notes from the Underground. I am here to answer the rumours - they're true. The process will go something like this: we will consider all suggestions and then whittle the field down to something manageable, say three names. At a date yet to be set, members vote for their preferred choice, winner take all. (To judge by the diverse opinions on this matter, we'll probably end up in a three way tie.) Please participate in this process. Our name has been a sticky point for some time and it's important if we're to move forward that we settle on something everyone can feel comfortable with.

This edition of N.F.T.U. marks the beginning of bi-monthly publication. I had considered doing this earlier but was certain that the moment I announced it, all the regular contributors would desert me. This doesn't concern me any longer. Your participation has been great and a real show of your commitment. Take a bow.

Potential subscribers may wish to note the fabulous bargains to be had at the present time. Five dollars for six issues - these prices can't last!

Replacing my editor's cap for my banker's bowler, I now present our finances.

Last Report.....	\$225.00
Receipts.....	<u>25.00</u>
Total.....	\$250.00

Ted

